

[1938]

US 194

8 fol.

5c

THE

NEGRO

UNDER

CAPITALISM

PUBLISHED

For the

REVOLUTIONARY

WORKERS

LEAGUE

By

DEMOS PRESS

Box 141, ALFRED STA.

DETROIT

MICH.

Labor Donated

US 194
8 fol.

"THE WORKER IN THE WHITE SKIN CAN NEVER BE FREE WHILE
THE WORKER IN THE BLACK SKIN IS ENSLAVED." -K. Marx

THE
NEGRO
UNDER
CAPITALISM

RESOLUTION

Adopted by the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the
Revolutionary Workers League of the United States

September 3-4, 1938

Chicago

DEMOS PRESS
Box 141, Alfred Sta.
Detroit, Michigan

-PUBLISHERS OF "REVOLT"-

The Negro Under Capitalism

IS DEDICATED

to those thousands of American workers
BLACK AND WHITE
who tomorrow will lead the proletarian revolution

foreword

The black man will be the most determined force in the American Revolution. He is the most intensely exploited. In the destruction of the capitalist mode of production, he, most of all, has nothing to lose but his chains.

For this reason he is feared and hated by our capitalist overlords and is a source of embarrassment and object of hypocrisy to labor's misleaders and the bourgeois lackeys of all stripes.

And for that same reason the revolutionary Marxists do not hesitate to sweep aside the accumulated cant and prejudice of centuries in order to make it possible to establish the unity of the proletariat of all races, for their mutual emancipation.

The problem of the Negro as a race cannot be separated from the problem of the Negro as a worker. Only by facing and solving them both together can the basis be laid for his union with the white worker for the successful achievement of the proletarian revolution.

To that end the Central Committee publishes this short treatise, the position of the Revolutionary Workers League of the United States on the Negro question, in the hope that it will help accelerate the process of clarification necessary to bind together workers of all races in class struggle action.

We do so the more willingly, furthermore, since history teaches us that in this process of unification will be built the party of Marxism, the indispensable engine of the revolution.

And that is the central task of our movement.



THE NEGRO UNDER CAPITALISM

1. INTRODUCTION

Contrary to popular opinion, the special problem of the Negro under capitalism is not created by the physical differences existing between the Negroid and other peoples of the earth. Propagandists of race hatred invariably over-emphasize the real biological differences and assert the existence of other (imaginary) differences which they base on such superficial considerations as skin pigmentation, lip thickness, character of the hair, and flatness of the feet. These superficial features are the product of the influences on the human body of the African climate, desert soil, and jungle life over thousands of years. They are slowly being altered by social changes in Africa and throughout the world, by miscegenation and racial blending, and by the influences of other climates, temperatures, soils, and foods.

The racists still employ the term "hybrid" in connection with the offspring of race mixture. But this term applied to mankind has no real meaning. In its fundamental biological sense it means a cross that cannot reproduce, such as the mule in the horse family. With humans, however, should the lowliest pygmy miscegenously reproduce with the highest, titled "blue-blood", the off-spring could go on reproducing. In other words, there are no basic biological divisions in the races of man. As a matter of fact, this fundamental biological fact, disregarded by the racists, confirms our revolutionary prospect of worldizing all of human society.

To understand the problem of the Negro we must turn from these superficial differences to the larger social forces of economics, politics, commerce, industry, and agriculture. But in doing so, we cannot altogether ignore the wide vogue enjoyed by the exaggerated contentions and fantasies of the racial propagandists.

"White superiority", "the white man's burden", "natural antipathy", and "white assimilation" are cynical theories designed to conceal the economic, political, and social motives of the ruling class which concocted them. In other words, while the racists may be aware of the social forces, they invariably justify racial suppression. Just as in the past they endorsed the rape of continents and the victimization of millions

of humans in the vicious (but profitable) slave traffic, so today they apologize for the vilest form of race plunder by the imperialists.

2. WHENCE DOES RACE HATRED ARISE?

Throughout the ages racial agitators and propagandists have served to strengthen the power of the rulers of society. They have helped mould religions (especially the white man's religion of aggression, Christianity), laws, penology, philosophy, and education of all class societies in such a way as to keep mankind divided along racial lines. Inter-racial division invariably strengthens the ruling class parasites who usurp the wealth produced by the labor of the broad masses.

Complex institutions and ideologies have been fostered to develop race discrimination and division. These institutions obstruct the scientific understanding of the whole question. In fact, so imposing is the influence of race discrimination in class society today that even Negro enthusiasts become infected with it. They exalt "Negro culture" as constituting an "empire within an empire", complementing and supplementing the culture of capitalist civilization of which lynching is an integral part.

For example, the movement initiated by Booker T. Washington was and remains a movement based upon the principles of social separatism. Various Negro institutions, universities, churches, fraternal organizations, and the Y.M.C.A. seek to inculcate in the minds of the colored peoples the idea of self-advancement within the sphere of their own "ghettos" or communities. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded by the brilliant W.E.B. DuBois, and now led by the famous author, Walter White, and the National Negro Conference headed by John P. Davis, confine themselves to similar insulating education and activity. More reactionary are such organizations as the Garvey movement, Father Divine, and the National Urban League. The first is a back-to-Africa movement, an attempt to solve the Negro problem in the United States by running away from it; the second is a backward religious sect seeking to divert the attention of the Negroes from their real problems to the realm of "spiritual" obsessions and fanaticism. The National Urban League, pretending to be an organization for the improvement of the Negro Peoples is fundamentally a training ground and supply depot of colored "scabs" for the big corporations. These and other Negro organizations like them have one aim in common: to maintain the barriers which separate the white and the black peoples. Some actually help strengthen these barriers.

3. PHYSICAL AND HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Europe and Africa are distinct as environments - the physical conditions in which men struggle with nature to live and advance socially. Environment leaves deep imprints upon men's bodies. Europe has a mild climate and a fertile soil. It is easy to raise crops and sea food is easily accessible. There are no impenetrable barriers either by land or water. Cultural traits are easily transmitted. The soil, climate, and rainfall of Europe made the development of agriculture relatively easy. The underground resources of Europe - coal, iron, and other ores - facilitated the development of basic industries. Natural bays and harbors encouraged commerce by sea.

Almost the opposite was the fate of Africa. Vast deserts, stretches of barren soil, and dense forests retarded the development of agriculture and transportation. Its coastlines are even yet almost inaccessible. Its underground resources are deep, and though valuable, are not those from which basic industries can be built. Thus Africa the continent restrained the development of the African peoples. At the time of the rise of the mercantile capitalist system the Negroes were "backward peoples". Africa was isolated from the world. Its peoples were isolated from one another. They founded many cultures, but were unable to transmit them. Social development was consequently slow.

Because of that backwardness the colored races of Africa were victimized by the powerful European merchants launching out over the world in pursuit of trade, wealth, and exploitation. The rising capitalist rulers of European society did not hesitate to exterminate the aborigines in Australia, the West Indies, and in other parts of the world. It enslaved the inhabitants of Africa, the Americas and even the lowest strata in Europe itself. Due to similar environment the Europeans colonized the West Indies and the New World generally centuries before colonizing Africa. Slave trade, a natural product of the mercantile and colonial systems brought the Negro from Africa into the modern world. Millions of captured Africans were transplanted as slaves into colonies in North and South America and in the West Indies by Portuguese, Spanish, English, Dutch, Danish, and other European merchantment, who trafficked in the flesh of Africa for over four centuries.

Out of this forced transplantation of Negroes and their mixture with Indians and whites in the New World evolved the Mestizoes, Zambos, and Mulattoes who make up much of the populations of the islands of the West Indies, Mexico, and Central and South America, plus the 13,000,000 "yellows" or "browns", as they have been called, who constitute an overwhelming section of the United States population of African origin.

In the United States anyone with "African blood" in his veins, no matter how "white" he is, is considered as a Negro. By this criterion there are 35,000,000 Negroes in the New World. The population of the United States of Brazil alone is over 30% Negro. The densely populated islands of Jamaica, Haiti, and Barbadoes are almost entirely Negro. Cuba and many of the small islands, the Canal Zone, Colombia, Venezuela, and Guatemala have a high percentage of Negro population. In fact, the Caribbean area is characterized as the "Black Belt of the Caribbean". This same Caribbean section of the world more than any other provided the markets which made it possible for North American manufacturers to emerge as a class and free the North American colonies from British rule. Later this same manufacturing class challenged and defeated the rule of the slave masters of the South to establish what is today the dominant capitalism of the world. But United States capitalism, like European never dealt squarely with the Negroid peoples. It always discriminated against them. Even where Negro slaves fought gloriously and freed themselves and established their own government, as in Haiti, the United States and most other capitalist governments, refused for many years even to recognize them politically. Liberia, for example, was founded by freed Negroes sent to Africa by United States capitalist philanthropists as

part of their struggle against the slave masters of the South in the early part of the nineteenth century. Yet Liberia was not recognized by the United States government until after the Civil War.

In the struggle of the South American colonials against their mother country, Spain, the United States lent little positive support. The little Republic of Haiti gave far more. Rather it should be said that the U.S. capitalists prevented them from uniting and consolidating as nations. Through its Monroe Doctrine and Pan American Union it has divided them so as to dominate them more easily. In a word, United States capitalism, like European, has functioned to keep the Negroid peoples on the lowest rungs of the social ladder.

British, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, German, Belgian, and Dutch capitalisms grabbed the continent of Africa in the nineteenth century largely through loan-shark deals. Their exploitation of the Negro natives, especially in the Congo and in what has become the Union of South Africa, was terrific. From this exploitation they have wrung super profits which, with the help of their labor lieutenants at home, they bribed the upper strata of the working class in Europe to support their imperialist robbery. On the continent of Africa the European capitalist nations did as they wished with the natives as long as they respected each other's division of the spoils. There is no parallel to the Monroe Doctrine for Africa, although France (37%) and Great Britain (24%) have seized the "lion's share".

When capitalism evolved into its imperialist stage, it redivided the already divided world into debtor and creditor states. It transformed rulers of backward peoples into mere puppets of one imperialist nation or the other. Imperialist nations fomented and financed revolutions to substitute in place of puppets of other imperialist nations their own puppets. Consequently colonial revolutions were not emancipatory wars but bloody intrigues. Latin America has witnessed many such "revolutions" in the last two decades. "Dollar diplomacy" and all other imperialist diplomacy has instituted "machine gun rule" and poison gas attacks by marines.

Economic oppression has been equally tyrannical. Outmoded forms of enslavement such as semi-serfdom, impressment, contract labor, the pass system and actual slavery have been introduced in Asia, Africa, and South America since capitalism has entered its imperialist or decay stage.

Within capitalist countries, Fascist forms are advancing. Among other things, Fascism feeds on race hatred and persecution. The Negro problem has been aggravated by Italian fascism. A new "race" question has been created in Hitlerized Germany. In the New World fascism and reactionary racism are making headway.

The workers pay the price for following their class collaborationist bureaucrat leaders in the British, German, Belgium, Italian, French, and United States labor organizations. Through their labor misleaders the capitalists are able to bribe the working class into becoming super-patriots of "white civilization", or white chauvinists. The American Federation of Labor is a white chauvinist organization. And as long as

the Congress of Industrial Organizations maintains its present class collaborationist policies, it can not permanently benefit either the black or white workers. The South remains unorganized for the most part, primarily because labor to this day has been led by the capitalist system to draw the color line.

4. THE NEGRO AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT

The Negro question goes to the very roots of capitalist culture. The "white man's burden" is the racist interpretation of the colonial question; "white superiority" is their explanation of the backward position of the blacks in capitalist society; and "white assimilation" is their theory to justify whites lording it over the colored races.

If the proletariat, the revolutionary class in modern society, does not develop its own class ideas and action to oppose those of capitalism, it prolongs the decay stage of the already wornout system. The consequences to the exploited in that system become serious. Barbarism and the wiping out of whole peoples may result. In the decay stage of previous social systems the rulers destroyed entire peoples.

The proletariat has been retarded greatly by the unscientific racist conception of the Negro question imposed on it by capitalism and its agents. The Socialist parties of Europe and the United States and the Independent Labor Party of Great Britain never separated themselves from the rotten culture of white chauvinism. Socialist prime ministers such as Vandervelde of Belgium, MacDonald of England, and more recently Blum of France, headed imperialist governments that exploited Africa and other colonies while lending labor's approval to imperialist policies. After the Socialist parties left the destinies of the colonial masses to the tender "protection" of the capitalists and their "thieves kitchen", the League of Nations. We may judge the protection they received by the frenzied warfare conducted by the Spanish and French capitalists against the Riffians of Northern Africa, by the Italian capitalists against the Ethiopians, and by the Japanese capitalists against the Chinese. *the Great War

Under the control of Stalinism, the Third International too has gone back to white chauvinism. During the Italo-Ethiopian war the Stalinist government aided the imperialist designs of Mussolini by the sale of Soviet oil to Italy! Furthermore, the support the Third International has given to the "democratic" imperialists - to France and England through the League of Nations, to the United States through support of the Monroe Doctrine, the "Good Neighbor" policy, and its tyrannical hold over the Latin American peoples - has helped behead the struggles of the Negro peoples for their emancipation from imperialist exploitation. The Trotskyist "Fourth International" has completely ignored the Negro question.

5. HOW MARXISM SOLVES THE PROBLEM

The solution of the Negro question lies in fundamental social change. We live in the era of Proletarian Revolution. The first stage of this era has already begun. The solution of the deep-going social questions

of today (the industrial question, the agrarian question, the colonial question, the national question) are bound up with the problem of the Negro. The colonials are the natural allies of the proletariat, but they will not and cannot be won over to the proletarian revolution as long as the proletariat identifies itself with the capitalist exploiters of both. It must develop its own revolutionary class program.

The first step in that program is for the semi-colonials of the West Indies and Latin America, already fairly well advanced in nationalist culture, to shake off the yoke of American imperialism, that is, to defend their right to self-determination. Lenin said, "To defend this right does in no way mean to encourage the formation of free states, but on the contrary it leads to a freer, more fearless and therefore wider and more universal formation of larger governments and unions of governments - a phenomenon more advantageous for the masses and more in accord with economic development." United States capitalism has fostered Latin American disunity. Latin America cannot develop further along that line without further enslaving its peoples. The proletariat of the New World must sponsor the unification of Latin America through the collaboration of West Indian and Latin American peoples in the struggle against the oppressor colossus. We must help the Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Mexicans to begin thinking and acting in larger than national terms.

6. PROGRAM FOR THE UNITED STATES

The national aspects of the question are not fundamental or basic. The Negro people is not a nation. To characterize the Negro as an oppressed nationality is to play into the hands of reaction. The creation of a Negro sovereignty in the "Black Belt" of the South has been declared the basis for the solution of the Negro question by those who characterize it as a national question. But there is no basis whatever in life for the slogan of self-determination for the Negro peoples as a separate nation. They have no historically defined frontiers. Not only are they spread broadcast over the United States but their distribution over different parts of the country is constantly shifting. Economic and political factors produce great migrations. For example, since the World War, the trend has been from the country to the city, from the South to the North, although the depression of 1929 brought about a slight and temporary reversal of this tendency. Furthermore, there is no desire among the Negroes for self-determination, and this is of great importance. And finally, the Negroes possess no language of their own, no separate religion and institutions which demarcate them as a distinct nationality and as having a separate national culture. This false conception and the slogan of Negro self-determination deepens the gap in the United States between white and Negro workers, endangers the movements of liberation from the American colossus (West Indies), and so retards the development of the proletarian revolution.

The United States provides the setting for the fullest possible and most immediate incorporation of the Negro question into the program of the revolutionary proletariat. The first steps in this direction are: (1) dissemination of the above scientific analysis of the Negro question to the working class as a whole; (2) a firm stand against every

form of white chauvinism in all working class organizations; (3) a vigilant struggle against white chauvinism wherever it manifests itself - on the streets, in the theatres, hotels, work shops, passenger trains, busses, street cars, both in the north and in the south; (4) an intransigent fight for full social, economic, and political equality for Negroes; (5) a consistent demand that Negroes be elevated to positions of leadership within all working class organizations wherever they are qualified, and that policies be inaugurated to develop such qualifications of leadership; (6) special Negro education for work in the class struggle and in all phases of Marxism; (7) at all times create and develop solidarity between all workers, black and white, native and foreign born - regardless of nationality, race, or prior condition of life; (8) help orient the Negroes toward the class struggle, into both the elementary organizations (unions) and into the Marxian party.

The demand for full social, economic, and political equality for Negroes and Negroid peoples cannot be limited to the United States alone. It must be made a world-wide demand. The first steps toward this objective differ in different regions. They are determined by the social position of the Negroes or Negroid peoples in those regions. On the whole they can be more immediately realized in the United States than in the islands and countries south of the United States because here the Negroes are more advanced technically, economically, industrially, and politically. The islands and countries south of the United States are next in importance because their cultural and social development is more advanced than that of colonial Africa. The following program is therefore primarily designed for the United States.

7. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SOUTH

1. The Marxists in the United States must take up again the task of the organization of the south. This task must proceed in the teeth of the laws, customs, and institutions of the southern caste system. The assembly of Negro and white workers in the same meeting hall in the south is forbidden by segregation law and custom. For Negroes to participate as equals in meetings, with full right of voice and vote, or as secretaries or chairmen of meetings is a violation of southern chauvinist ethics. To participate with them in social affairs, to dine with them at a banquet, to play with them at games, or to dance with them at union dances, are all violations of southern customs and laws. To elect them as delegates and send them with delegations to be put up at hotels is to bump directly into vile segregation customs and laws in the north as well as in the south. This means first, then, that the organization of the south cannot proceed an inch without fighting for the special Negro demand: DOWN WITH SEGREGATION CUSTOMS AND LAWS!

2. Where strikes are conducted in the south, especially where the Negro workers are part of the organization and struggle of the union, the first retaliative measure the southern masters will make is to charge strikers with "vagrancy" and to sentence them to the chain gang. This means that the organization of the south cannot proceed effectively without fighting for the demand: DOWN WITH THE CHAIN GANG SYSTEM OF PERSECUTION.

3. In such an organizational drive involving strike struggles of which the Negro is part the lynching machinery of the southern Bourbons will

The Negro Under Capitalism

be brought into play. It is directed primarily against the Negro and white organizers of the movement. Unless these men are adequately protected the movement will be crushed. This means that the organization of the south, to be successful, must take up the special task of organizing ARMED DEFENSE AGAINST LYNCHING.

4. The organization of the south is unthinkable without a class struggle policy. This includes the defense of all class war prisoners, Negro and white. The special Negro demand for NEGRO JURYMEN goes hand in hand with the general working class slogan: DOWN WITH CAPITALIST JUSTICE.

5. The organization of the south demands THE RIGHT OF THE DISFRANCHISED NEGROES TO VOTE, THE RIGHT OF NEGROES TO JOIN UNIONS WITH WHITES and THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE INTO A REVOLUTIONARY WORKING CLASS PARTY.

6. Though the organization of the south should go on primarily in the industrial centers, the agricultural workers, Negro and white, will become part of the movement. The organization of tenant, share-cropping and other farmers, however, auxiliary to the main problem, will involve fighting for special Negro demands.

7. Segregation of the Negro extends throughout the whole United States, north and south. There are Negro ghettos in practically every American city. Here also, special Negro demands must be advanced in the teeth of the bitter opposition of the reactionary terrorist organizations of capitalism, the Ku Klux Klan, the Black Legion and others.

The execution of the above program of special Negro demands in conjunction with the general revolutionary program of the proletariat will lay the basis for unity in action of the black and white worker in their common struggle against the capitalist system, for a workers government and a new society. Without this unity the proletarian revolution in the United States cannot succeed. With it it is invincible!

Down with segregation customs and laws!

Down with the chain gang system of persecution!

Armed defense against lynching!

Defend all class war prisoners!

Down with capitalist class justice!

Enfranchise the Negro! Demand that he sit on juries!

Enforce the right of the Negro to join and organize unions!

Demand the right of the Negro to organize into a revolutionary working class party!

Full social, economic, and political equality for Negroes and Negroid peoples!

ORGANIZE THE SOUTH!

SUBSCRIBE TO

One Year (26 Issues) \$1.00 — Half Year (13 Issues) 50 cents

REVOLT

Official Organ of
REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS LEAGUE, U. S.

Box 141, Alfred Street Station
Detroit, Michigan

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____